

The Apostles Martyrdom

Pastor Joseph Clark – July 4, 2020

Then Thomas (also known as Didymus^[a]) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

- John 11:1

“First of all, you have to consider the transformation of the disciples.” Think about this. By Good Friday, when Christ was crucified, almost all of Jesus’ apostles had deserted him. They had scurried away like rats off a sinking ship. They did not want to be accused along with the Lord. They did not want to suffer His same fate, so they deserted Him. Yet three days later these timid, cowardly disciples were transformed into courageous, bold defenders of the Christian faith who were willing to give their lives for the truth of Jesus Christ.”

- Dr. J.P. Moreland

The word “martyr” is the same Greek word that is commonly translated “witness” in English Bibles. However, we by tradition, consider the word martyr in terms of one who gave their life for a cause they believe in.

Think about your life right now. Your home, your family, your employer, your hobbies, your significant other. What cause would you be willing to die for?

Artis International, a research institute based in Scottsdale, Arizona, conducted an extensive study into martyrdom. They conducted interviews with extremist groups and surveyed thousands of people from all over the world. The question was ‘What makes someone willing to die for a cause?’ The majority answer: Sacred values and dedication to a tight-knit group of people. In 2017 a Rasmussen Reports national telephone and online survey found that 73% of those surveyed said, that freedom of speech is worth dying for. However, filling out a survey is one thing. Making good on this is another story.

The first Apostle to martyr himself was Stephen. He rebuked the Jewish high council and prophetically denounced the Jewish people for their killing of the prophets. The event is documented by Luke in the Book of Acts:

Acts 7:54-60 New King James Version (NKJV)

Stephen the Martyr

⁵⁴ When they heard these things they were ^[a]cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth. ⁵⁵ But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ⁵⁶ and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”

⁵⁷ Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; ⁵⁸ and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

The bible documents three Martyrs when we include John the Baptist. Three more are documented by early verified sources (Josephus, Tertullian, Ignatius of Antioch). Eleven more are stated by historic tradition, with some conflicting claims.

With the exception of the Apostle John, Christ’s Apostles were martyred for their dedication to Christ’s commission:

- James (Martyred: 44–45 A.D.) Beheaded executioners’ sword in Jerusalem
- Peter (Martyred: ca. 64 A.D.) Crucified upside down in Rome
- Andrew (Martyred: 70 A.D.) Crucified in the city of Patras
- Thomas (Martyred: 70 A.D.) Stabbed with a spear in India
- Philip (Martyred: 54 A.D.) Crucified in Hierapolis, Turkey
- Matthew (Martyred: 60–70 A.D.) Stabbed by a sword in Ethiopia
- Nathanael (Bartholomew) (Martyred: 70 A.D.) Flayed to death by a whip in Albanopolis, Caucasias
- James the Lesser (Martyred: 63 A.D.) Egyption city of Ostrakine, where he was thrown form the top of a temple and bludgeoned to death.
- Simon the Zealot (Martyred: 74 A.D.) Sawed in half in Persia
- Judas Thaddeus (Martyred: 72 A.D.) Beaten with sticks to death in Beirut

- Matthias (Martyred: 70 A.D.) Stoned while hanging on a cross in Ethiopia
- Paul (Martyred: 67 A.D.) Beheaded with a sword in Rome

These were not ignorant people. Many were well schooled in multiple languages, history, philosophy, mathematics, and medicine. They had families and much to live for. Unless these men truly witnessed Christ's signs, miracles, and resurrection, why would they spend their lives putting themselves at risk of imprisonment, torture, and eventual death?

The Holy Spirit tells us in The Word:

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, (2Timothy 3:12)

If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. (1 Peter 4:14-16)

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6:9-10)

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:10)

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So, everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, ... (Matthew 10:28-33)

For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:10)

"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. (John 15:18)

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? (Romans 8:31-35)

Then I saw thrones and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4)

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, (Matthew 5:44)

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:10-12)

As saved Christians we are to take up our own cross, expect persecution for our faith, and attacks of oppression and harassment from the enemy. We give our lives to Christ when (in accordance with the scriptures) we choose to accept Christ as our Lord and Savior.

“Tolerance implies no lack of commitment to one's own beliefs. Rather it condemns the oppression or persecution of others.” - John F. Kennedy

The persecution of Christians is not isolated. Instead, it is rampant and expanding around the world. – Katie Pavlich

As brothers and sisters in Christ, it is our duty and privilege to be the targets of persecution for our Lord and Savior. It is our obedient obligation and duty to not dim our light in secular settings, but to ensure that it shines bright.

Why do we do this? To quote Lee Strobel, ““People will not die for their religious beliefs if they know that their religious beliefs are false.”

We know that God’s kingdom is a reality.

Sources:

Biblegateway.com. 2020. Biblegateway.Com: A Searchable Online Bible In Over 150 Versions And 50 Languages. [online] Available at: <<https://www.biblegateway.com/>> [Accessed 3 June 2020].

Topical Bible - Bible Verses by Topic. <https://www.openbible.info/topics/>.

30 inspiring Christian quotes. (2020, February 10).

Crosswalk.com. <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/inspiring-quotes/30-inspiring-christian-quotes.html>

Lee Strobel – Galileo unchained. (n.d.). Galileo Unchained. <https://galileounchained.com/tag/lee-strobel/>

Persecution quotes - Page 5 - BrainyQuote. (n.d.).

BrainyQuote. https://www.brainyquote.com/topics/persecution-quotes_5

List of Christian martyrs. (2008, June 17). Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Retrieved July 4, 2020, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_martyrs#According_to_the_Gospels_and_Acts_of_the_Ap

Saint Stephen | Facts, theology, & martyrdom. (n.d.). Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Stephen>

Martyrs in the Bible: 8 that gave their life for Christ. (n.d.). What Christians Want To Know — Bible Verses, Quotes, Christian Answers, Songs and

More. <https://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/martyrs-in-the-bible-8-that-gave-their-life-for-christ/>

Evidence #1 for Resurrection: Transformation of the disciples. (n.d.). Pathway to Victory. <https://ptv.org/devotional/evidence-1-transformation-of-the-disciples/>